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SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - ELECTIONS IN PALESTINE
IRAQ - VIOLENCE BEFORE ELECTIONS
PARIS - MONDAY, JANUARY 10, 2005

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

- [11. ELECTIONS IN PALESTINE](#)
[12. IRAQ - VIOLENCE BEFORE ELECTIONS](#)

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

TWO MAJOR STORIES DOMINATE TODAY'S FRONT PAGES AND COMMENTARIES: THE PROJECTED VICTORY BY MAHMOUD ABBAS IN PALESTINE AND WHAT THIS MAY MEAN FOR THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS, AND THE SITUATION IN IRAQ, WEEKS BEFORE THE ELECTIONS, WHICH ACCORDING TO CATHOLIC LA CROIX, COULD BE COMPROMISED BY VIOLENCE.

IN THE MIDDLE EAST THE OUTCOME OF THE ELECTIONS IS WIDELY CONSIDERED AS A "SIGNAL OF HOPE" (LIBERATION AND LE PARISIEN) AND A "VOTE FOR PEACE" (LE FIGARO). COMMENTATORS AGREE THAT "THE ELECTION IN PALESTINE, ALONG WITH PRESIDENT BUSH'S RE-ELECTION AND THE NEW SHARON-PEREZ GOVERNMENT GIVE A NEW PERSPECTIVE TO PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST." (SEE PART C)

FM BARNIER IS INTERVIEWED IN POPULAR RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE PARISIEN (AND ALSO IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE THE INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE): "THIS IS A VICTORY FOR DEMOCRACY, AND A FIRST VICTORY FOR PEACE. IN ISRAEL, SHARON IS AT A HISTORIC CROSSROADS, AND I BELIEVE HE WILL BE UP TO THE TASK. WE ARE IN A NEW CONTEXT, WITH A LEGITIMATE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY, A MUCH MORE OPEN ISRAELI GOVERNMENT WHICH IS COMMITTED TO WITHDRAWING FROM GAZA, A U.S. PRESIDENT NEWLY ELECTED AND EUROPEANS WHO STAND UNITED AND ARE AVAILABLE. WE WANT A NEW TRANSATLANTIC PARTNERSHIP: THE TEST WILL LIE IN OUR COLLECTIVE ABILITY TO GET THE PEACE PROCESS IN THE MIDDLE EAST BACK ON TRACK."

RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE FIGARO CARRIES AN OP-ED BY ISRAELI AMBASSADOR NISSIM ZVILI ON THE "DIFFICULT RELATIONS BETWEEN FRANCE AND ISRAEL. AT LEAST WE HAVE EACH ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THERE IS A DEEP BREAK BETWEEN THE TWO SOCIETIES. UNFORTUNATELY WE CONTINUE TO HAVE A DEAF-MUTE DIALOGUE. WE LISTEN TO EACH OTHER POLITELY, BUT EACH STICKS TO HIS GUNS. AFTER THE EUPHORIA OF THE OSLO ACCORDS, WE ARE MODERATE IN OUR ENTHUSIASM, IN ORDER TO GIVE THE NEGOTIATIONS THEIR BEST CHANCE FOR SUCCESS."

THE SECOND MAJOR STORY, IRAQ AND THE GROWING DAILY VIOLENCE, LEADS MANY COMMENTATORS TO DOUBT WHETHER THE ELECTIONS WILL BE ABLE TO BE CONDUCTED FAIRLY. CATHOLIC LA CROIX HEADLINES "IRAQI ELECTIONS UNDERMINED BY VIOLENCE" AND INTERVIEWS PIERRE-JEAN LUIZARD, A RESEARCHER AT THE CNRS (THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH) WHO SAYS: "NO ARMY WILL BE ABLE TO LESSEN THE INSECURITY. IRAQ HAS BECOME A BATTLEGROUND FOR A CONFLICT BETWEEN THE U.S. AND A FUNDAMENTALIST MOVEMENT, WHICH SEEMS TO HAVE A HOLD ON IRAQ'S SUNNI COMMUNITY AND COULD SPREAD. THE ATTACKS IN IRAQ HAVE WORSENED IN THE PAST THREE MONTHS AND KILLED A NUMBER OF FIGURES WHO MIGHT HAVE PLAYED A ROLE IN MANAGING THE COUNTRY. I REMAIN PESSIMISTIC ABOUT IRAQ."

LEFT-OF-CENTER LIBERATION CARRIES AN OP-ED BY FRANCOIS GERE OF THE FRENCH INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC ANALYSIS ON THE SUICIDE ATTACKS WHICH HAVE BEEN PLAGUING BAGHDAD. (SEE PART C) COMMENTATORS, WRITING ON THE DISAPPEARANCE OF LIBERATION'S JOURNALIST, NOTE BAGHDAD'S GROWING INSECURITY PRIOR TO THE ELECTIONS.

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

ELECTIONS IN PALESTINE

"A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY FOR THE PEACE PROCESS" LUC DE BAROCHEZ IN RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE FIGARO (01/10): "THE MIDDLE EAST HAS ENTERED INTO AN ERA OF HOPE. PRESIDENT BUSH, WHO DOES NOT HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT RE-ELECTION, HAS A FREE HAND TO GET MORE INVOLVED IN THE MIDDLE EAST. FRENCH FM BARNIER HAS INDICATED THAT 'THE NEW RELATIONSHIP' BETWEEN THE AMERICANS AND THE EUROPEANS, AS ILLUSTRATED BY CHIRAC'S VISIT TO

WASHINGTON IN THE NEAR FUTURE AND BUSH'S VISIT TO BRUSSELS ON FEBRUARY 22, COULD SERVE AS A 'LEVER' TO GET THE PEACE PROCESS BACK ON TRACK. BUT THE ELECTION OF ABBAS MUST NOT RAISE INCONSIDERATE HOPES: HE IS AFTER ALL ARAFAT'S HEIR AND NOT VERY POPULAR IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES. IF THE AMERICANS AND THE EUROPEANS DO NOT COMMIT THEMSELVES FURTHER, THE DISAPPOINTMENT WILL BE ON PAR WITH THE HOPES BORN OF THE ELECTION."

"A WINDOW"

GERARD DUPUY IN LEFT-OF-CENTER LIBERATION (01/10): "WESTERN NATIONS MUST HEAR THE MESSAGE SENT BY THE PALESTINIANS AND ACCEPT THEIR SKEPTICISM, EXPRESSED TO THEM AS WELL AS TO MAHMOUD ABBAS. HE WAS ELECTED WITHOUT ANY REAL OPPOSITION, BUT WITH THE FIRM DEMAND THAT HE GET RESULTS. THIS MEANS THAT IF HE IS SLOW TO ACHIEVE THEM, HE WILL BE HELD RESPONSIBLE. THE OFFER FOR A CONFERENCE ON THE MIDDLE EAST IN LONDON PROVES THAT TONY BLAIR IS AWARE OF THE URGENCY OF GRASPING THE OPPORTUNITY AT HAND, EVEN IF THE CONFERENCE IS NOT THE ANSWER. AN UNEXPECTED WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY HAS OPENED IN THE MIDDLE EASTERN IMPASSE. THE COUNTDOWN IS ALREADY ON, BEFORE THAT WINDOW CLOSES OVER THE COMPROMISE WHICH ABBAS HAS LINKED TO HIS ELECTION."

"PEACE IS AGAIN POSSIBLE"

PIERRE ROUSSELIN IN RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE FIGARO (01/10): "NOW THAT PALESTINE HAS ELECTED A PRESIDENT WHO IS NOT ARAFAT, PEACE WITH ISRAEL IS ONCE AGAIN POSSIBLE. AT THIS STAGE WE ARE SPEAKING OF A FRAGILE HOPE, BUT A HOPE NEVERTHELESS. IT IS FOUNDED ON THE FACT THAT ISRAEL AND THE U.S. ARE READY TO DEAL WITH ABBAS. WHOSE TASK IS IMMENSE: NAMELY HE MUST SUCCEED WHERE ARAFAT FAILED. THE ELECTION OF ABBAS WILL HAVE BEEN THE EASIEST PART. NOW THAT HE HAS BEEN ELECTED, ABBAS'S FATE IS VERY MUCH IN THE HANDS OF SHARON: HE CAN MAKE HIS WORK EASIER, OR ON THE CONTRARY MORE DIFFICULT. IN THE MEANTIME, THE U.S. AND EUROPE MUST GRASP THIS UNPRECEDENTED OPPORTUNITY. WE MUST SALUTE THIS SHOW OF PALESTINIAN DEMOCRACY AND HELP THE NEWLY-ELECTED PRESIDENT. AS WELL AS CONVINCE SHARON NOT TO OPPOSE HIM."

"SHARON'S ATTITUDE WILL BE DECISIVE"

THOMAS DE ROCHECHOUART IN RIGHT-OF-CENTER FRANCE SOIR (01/10): "HIS LACK OF A RIVAL HAS GIVEN ABBAS A CERTAIN MARGIN OF MANEUVER TO VOICE UNPOPULAR IDEAS SUCH AS ENDING THE ARMED INTIFADA. HIS SUCCESS WILL DEPEND ON ISRAEL'S DESIRE TO COLLABORATE WITH HIM. CAUGHT BETWEEN SHARON AND THE ARMED REBELLION, ABBAS WILL BE PLAYING A DIFFICULT GAME. HE WILL NEED TO BE CONVINCING, OR HIS POSITION AS A MODERATE WILL SOON BECOME IMPOSSIBLE."

IRAQ - VIOLENCE BEFORE ELECTIONS

"IRAQ AND THE POLICY OF SUICIDE ATTACKS"

FRANCOIS GERE IN LEFT OF CENTER LIBERATION (01/10): "SINCE ALLAWI'S ELECTION, AN INSURRECTION IS RAVAGING TWO THIRDS OF IRAQ. THOSE IN POWER ARE MINIMIZING THE ATTACKS. IN THE PAST FEW MONTHS, IRAQ HAS BECOME THE THEATRE OF A VERY WORRISOME FORM OF ATTACK: SUICIDE-BOMBINGS. THE AIM OF THE ATTACKS AGAINST THE AMERICANS IS THREEFOLD: TO EMBARRASS THEM POLITICALLY, TO HIT THEM WHERE THEIR BIG WAR MACHINE IS MOST VULNERABLE AND TO ERODE THEIR MORAL. WHO ARE THE ATTACKERS? NOT A BUNCH OF DISPIRITED INDIVIDUALS, AS THE AUTHORITIES SAY. THE ATTACKERS COME FROM THREE SEPARATE GROUPS, THE SUNNI ANSAR AL-ISLAM, . A RADICAL GROUP OF FORMER SADDAM HUSSEIN SUPPORTERS AND A VAST GROUP COMPRISED OF FOREIGNERS. THEY HAVE A COMMON OBJECTIVE: THE AMERICANS, WHICH MAY NOT BE THE ONLY ONE. BUT THESE THREE GROUPS, FORTUNATELY, LACK COORDINATION. HEREIN LIES THEIR WEAKNESS. IRAQ IS LIKE A 'FAILED STATE' WHERE DIFFERENT AND UNCONTROLLABLE FACTIONS ARE AT WAR. THE MORE INTELLIGENT ONES ARE TRYING TO MANIPULATE THE AMERICAN MILITARY FORCES, WHO ARE LIKE SO MANY ELEPHANTS IN A CHINA SHOP. THESE GROUPS, IRAQ'S NEW POLITICAL FORCE, ARE NOW ABLE TO TRAIN HUNDREDS OF VOLUNTEERS FOR SUICIDE ATTACKS WHICH REPRESENT A MAJOR DANGER FOR THE FUTURE. THEY WILL BE ABLE TO DISSEMINATE IN THE ARAB PENINSULA, AND CAUSE MORE DESTABILIZATION. NOTHING PROVES THAT THE DANGER WILL REMAIN CONFINED TO THAT REGION. IF WE IN EUROPE TEND TO NEGLECT THE EXISTENCE OF THESE SUICIDE ATTACKERS, THEY ON THE OTHER HAND HAVE NOT FORGOTTEN WE EXIST." LEACH